

# Extreme Beliefs: Mapping the Terrain

*International Workshop*

When: 15-16 December 2021

Where: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Organizers: Rik Peels, Imane Amara, Nora Kindermann, Naomi Kloosterboer, Finlay Malcolm, Chris Ranalli

Project website: [www.extremebeliefs.com](http://www.extremebeliefs.com)

Cautionary note: The workshop will be held physically, but also digitally for those who can only attend online

## **Theme**

Fundamentalism, extremism, radicalism, fanaticism, terrorism, and conspiricism have something in common: they are often driven by extreme beliefs. Of course, these phenomena consist of much more than just beliefs; they comprise affections, actions, rituals, customs, symbols, and much more. Yet, extreme beliefs seem an inalienable part of them. Since such beliefs are less visible than actions, they have received less attention in academic scholarship. They raise many questions, though: when are beliefs extreme?, what makes an extreme belief 'extreme'?, can fundamentalist and extremist beliefs be justified?, to what extent do extreme beliefs play a role in explaining phenomena like extremism and terrorism?, are there common ways that such extreme beliefs come about among these different movements?, how do extreme beliefs relate to moral and epistemic character?

This international workshop addresses these pivotal questions at the intersection of research on extremism, conspiracy theory, fundamentalism, terrorism, and radicalism. The aim, then, is to provide a rigorous conceptual map of the terrain of extreme beliefs, so that scholars in these fields have the resources to empirically and historically scrutinize these challenging societal phenomena.

## **Set-up**

The workshop is entirely plenary and consists only of key-note lectures. It is preceded by a book symposium on Quassim Cassam's monograph *Extremism: A Philosophical Analysis* (Routledge, September 2021). Anyone who attends the workshop is welcome to freely attend the book symposium.

## **Questions**

- What are radicalism, fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, and fanaticism and how do they relate to one another?
- Do these phenomena come in degrees?
- What are the challenges in defining and mapping radicalism, fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, and fanaticism and what are desiderata that fruitful conceptualizations would meet?
- Is there a time-dimension to these phenomena?
- How does belief in conspiracy theory relate to each of these?
- What is the role of extreme beliefs in accounting for these phenomena and what is their relation to affections, dispositions, actions, and so on, when it comes to explaining, predicting, and preventing them?
- Is extremism inherently violent?

- What is the relation between extremism and epistemic and moral virtue and vice?
- Are extremism and fundamentalism necessarily morally and or epistemically deficient?
- Is extremism always unjust?
- Can extremism, or extreme beliefs, ever be rational?
- Can beliefs be extreme in ways that are not political (e.g., moral, metaphysical)?

### **Speakers**

- Tahir Abbas (University of Leiden, the Netherlands)
- Quassim Cassam (University of Warwick, UK)
- Beatrice de Graaf (University of Utrecht, the Netherlands)
- Nora Kindermann (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands)
- Nomi Claire Lazar (University of Ottawa, Canada)
- Finlay Malcolm (University of Hertfordshire, UK)
- Avishai Margalit (Hebrew University, Israel)
- Rik Peels (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands)
- Chris Ranalli (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands)
- Ruth Tietjen (University of Copenhagen, Denmark)

### **Attendance Fee**

Digital attendance: for free. Registration will be needed, though.

### **Contact Details**

Imane Amara

Student Assistant ERC Starting Grant Extreme Beliefs (2020-2025)

De Boelelaan 1105

1081 HV Amsterdam

The Netherlands

Email: [extremebeliefs.fgw@vu.nl](mailto:extremebeliefs.fgw@vu.nl)